

Wyoming Army National Guard digs out Rock River

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It wasn't Katrina, but it might as well have been as far as the residents of Rock River were concerned.

It all started around Christmas with a big snow storm, then the wind – gusts of 90 mph blowing old and new snow. One resident said it was so bad they even had a train derailment the first part of January and they just haven't been able to get ahead of the snow accumulation.

On Feb. 6, Rock River and Albany County asked the governor to send the Wyoming National Guard to help. The Guard responded with 15 Soldiers and a variety of equipment for a three-day snow removal mission.

Carol Bartholomew, a Rock River resident, said the streets were so bad she had to leave her car close to the highway and walk to her house because she couldn't get close to it. Even going grocery shopping had to be correctly planned since she would have to carry her groceries several blocks through the drifts.

Sgt. 1st Class Devin Worman, noncommissioned officer in charge, said the residents have been wonderful. While there, the unit has been able to get all of the side streets and driveways cleared, enabling emergency vehicles access to the residents and fire hydrants. The crew had moved more than 300 dump truck loads of snow by the third day.

The Soldiers were also able to dig out propane tanks so they could be filled and provide heat again. Local school children even asked the Soldiers to have lunch with them and then insisted on getting all of the Soldiers' autographs.

One of the autographs was the University of Wyoming's mascot, "Pistol Pete's", Sgt. Troy Phillips, a member of the unit, who deployed to Iraq in 2005 -2006. Phillips, who has played the mascot for a few years, said, "It is nice to know we are using our resources locally, as well as nationally. It is nice to be able to help our local community."

Staff Sgt. Donnie Nash said, "We missed out on helping with Katrina since we were deployed. But what we are doing here is why people get into the Guard, to help our local communities and support our state missions."